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Blind to Xi-Trump summit, India hails 'strategic' US pact

• Analysts warn warming US-China ties may undermine India's multipolar world vision, weaken Quad-like groups
• Pakistan assessing impact of deal, says Foreign Office

By Our Correspondent

NEW DELHI: India and the United States on Friday inked a 10-year defence framework agreement, a deal India's defence minister described as a "signal" of growing strategic alignment, even as warming US-China ties raised questions about the region's geopolitical landscape.

Indian reports confirmed the defence pact was sealed at a meeting here between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his American counterpart Peter Hegseth.

The "convergence" however seemed undermined by a potentially opposite view on the Obama era encircling of China that Chinese and US presidents presented at a globally watched meeting in South Korea.

Indian newspaper *The Hindu* noted that the meeting of US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Busan "sent ripple effects to India".

Following the talks, US tariffs on China were cut to 47 per cent, leaving India and Brazil with the highest rate at 50pc.

The paper quoted unnamed experts as saying the US-China "G-2" alliance could significantly impact the region. Considering that Pakistan is in clover with both countries, India's diplomatic challenges have become only that much more forbidding.

The Singh-Hegseth meeting was not bereft of its ironies. "The firming up of the pact came amid efforts by the two sides to repair ties that came under severe strain following Washington's slapping of 50pc tariffs on Indian goods," *The Hindu* reported.

Mr Singh announced on X that the signing of the deal marks a new era in their already robust defence relationship, emphasising the growing strategic convergence and the importance of their partnership in maintaining a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific region.

Mr Hegseth stated the agreement strengthens defence ties, crucial for regional stability, deterrence, coordination, info sharing, and tech cooperation. "Our defence ties have never been stronger," he said.

Mr Hegseth and Mr Singh are in Kuala Lumpur for a meeting with ASEAN member states and dialogue partners.

Moments before the summit, Mr Trump announced the "G-2 will convene shortly!".

When asked about the summit, according to *The Hindu*, India's Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was non-committal.

The spokesperson stated that the impact of the recent Trump-Xi talks on their domain was still being evaluated and he was unaware of the technicalities. When asked specifically about the G-2 reference, he suggested directing questions about US-China relations to either country.

The idea of a "G-2" to manage global issues was floated about 15 years ago during a 2009 summit between then-presidents Barack Obama and Hu Jintao. However, Obama never used the term, and Washington dropped the concept by 2011 as US-China tensions grew.

On his flight back to the US, Mr Trump mentioned plans to visit China in April 2026 and host Mr Xi later that year. No date is set for Trump's India visit for the Quad Summit with PM Modi, and *The Hindu* suggested it won't happen in 2025.

"The question won't just be whether he will be part of the Quad summit in India, but whether his new 'G-2' plans with China will dilute the group's agenda to secure a free and open Indo-Pacific," *The Hindu* concluded.

Move being assessed

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Office stated that it is too early to comment on the pact, which is currently being assessed for its implications in South Asia.

"The agreement is a recent development, implemented early this morning. We are currently assessing its implications, especially concerning peace, security, and stability in South Asia," a spokesperson for the Foreign Office said.

KUALA LUMPUR: Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his American counterpart Peter Hegseth hold up the signed defence framework deal.—X/@SecWar

Umrah visa validity to be curtailed from next week

Monitoring Desk

KARACHI: The Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah has reduced the validity of Umrah visas from three months to one month from the date of issuance, Saudi news channel *Al Arabiya.net* reported.

The new amendments, which will go into effect from next week, also includes the cancellation of the visa 30 days after its date of issuance in case the pilgrim has not entered the kingdom within this period.

Reducing the visa's validity, however, will not affect the permitted duration of stay after the pilgrim arrives in Saudi Arabia. All those arriving to perform Umrah are allowed to stay for three months.

The changes were made to prevent overcrowding of pilgrims in the two holy cities during cooler months, according to Ahmed Bajafar, adviser to the National Committee for Umrah and Visit.

Although Umrah rituals are solely performed in Makkah, many Umrah pilgrims seize the chance to visit Madina during their short trip to Saudi Arabia.

In October, Riyadh introduced stricter Umrah rules, including mandatory pre-booking of accommodation and verifying transport bookings on Nusuk or Masar upon arrival. The kingdom has recently made it clear that holders of all types of visas are allowed to perform Umrah during their stay.

Quetta remains offline amid security concerns

By Saleem Shahid

QUETTA: Internet and mobile data services remained suspended across the provincial capital of Balochistan on Friday, causing inconvenience and hardship to individuals and institutions.

Officials said that internet, data, and mobile services were suspended in the wake of threats from some banned groups. E-banking and other online services of both private and government departments were affected due to the move.

A notification issued by the Secretary of the Ministry of Interior and Narcotics Control, Islamabad, between Thursday night and Friday stated that 3G and 4G services were required to be jammed in Quetta district owing to the peculiar law and order situation and threat perceptions.

It said that call, data, and complete mobile services would remain suspended. "These services will remain suspended on October 31, 2025, from zero hours to 24 hours," the notification read.

In view of the threats mentioned in the notification, strict security measures were witnessed in Quetta.

PARC reform pledged after China identifies major gaps

• Underfunding, outdated labs, brain drain plague the country's apex agri-research body, joint assessment finds • Tanveer announces high-level panel to ensure execution of reform plan

By Amin Ahmed

ISLAMABAD: The Minister for Food Security vowed to transform the country's apex agricultural research body, after a joint assessment conducted alongside China identified chronic under-investment, outdated laboratories and equipment, weak research commercialisation, and persistent brain drain as major challenges for Pakistan Agricultural Research Council (PARC).

The comprehensive study, carried out by the Chinese Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs and the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, in collaboration with PARC, aimed to identify structural gaps in Pakistan's agricultural research system and propose a roadmap for institutional revitalisation in line with global scientific standards.

The joint study assessed the performance, infrastructure, and capabilities of PARC, National Agricultural Research Centre (NARC), and its eleven research institutes.

The report emphasised that overcoming these challenges requires a holistic reform strategy focused on sustainable funding, efficient performance evaluation, stronger linkages between research and farmers, and better coordination between federal and provincial research bodies.

It also underscored the need to align research priorities with national goals of food security, climate resilience, and economic growth through the development of a National Agricultural Science and Technology Roadmap. The findings of the assessment were discussed at a high-level meeting in Islamabad on Friday, chaired by Minister for National Food Security and Research Rana Tanveer Hussain.

He announced that the government would revamp PARC under the Strategic Reform and Cooperation Plan with China.

The minister said the government was fully committed to transforming PARC into a modern, efficient, and innovation-driven institution capable of leading the country's food security agenda.

Mr Hussain praised the efforts of the Chinese ministry and academy for their valuable support in preparing a forward-looking reform roadmap for Pakistan's agricultural research sector.

He added that the recommendations of the Chinese ministry and academy would be implemented "in letter and spirit" to make PARC a hub of agricultural advancement, ensuring that farmers benefit directly from modern technology, value addition, and research-based solutions.

The minister announced the formation of a high-level implementation committee comprising representatives from the Ministry of National Food Security and Research, PARC, and other key stakeholders to ensure timely execution of the reform plan with clear milestones and accountability mechanisms.

SC stays PHC order to tax ETPB assets

Board's lawyer argues local tax can't be levied on federal assets

By Nasir Iqbal

ISLAMABAD: The Supreme Court's Constitutional Bench (CB) on Friday suspended the Peshawar High Court's March 10, 2020, order that upheld the Cantonment Board Peshawar's authority to levy property tax on assets managed by the Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB).

The five-judge bench, headed by Justice Aminuddin Khan, also issued notices to the Cantonment Board Peshawar and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Excise Department on ETPB's civil appeals challenging the imposition of tax on federal properties vested in and managed by the federal government through the board.

Appearing on behalf of ETPB, senior advocate Hafiz Ehsaan Ahmad Khokhar submitted that the levy of property tax on the federal properties was unconstitutional and violated Article 165 of the Constitution, which he said categorically barred the imposition of any provincial or local tax on the property of the federation without its consent.

The counsel emphasised that no such consent was ever accorded by the federal government, rendering the impugned notices void ab initio.

Advocate Khokhar argued that under Section 6 of the Evacuee Trust Properties (Management and Disposal) Act, 1975, all evacuee trust properties stand vested in the government, with the ETPB serving merely as its statutory instrumentality.

Accordingly, any attempt by a Cantonment Board to impose property tax on such properties amounted to taxing the federation itself, a measure expressly prohibited by the constitutional scheme, he said.

Referring to Article 265 of the Constitution, the counsel contended that no tax can be levied or collected except by authority of law, and any levy inconsistent with the Constitution or imposed without legislative competence was null and void.

Since the Cantonment Board derives its powers solely from delegated legislation and lacks constitutional competence to tax federal property, its imposition constitutes a clear usurpation of federal fiscal authority.

The counsel submitted that ETPB properties were federal in nature as per Section 6 of the ETPB Act 1975, dedicated to religious, charitable and welfare purposes, and maintained through federal resources without availing local municipal services.

Watchdog paints 2025 as 'bleak year' for Pakistani media

• PPF report mentions 137 attacks targeting journalists in 10 months • Notes eight arrests, 30 FIRs, 23 actions initiated by FIA and cybercrime agency
• Calls for genuine, stakeholder-led reform rather than 'bulldozing' measures

By Kalbe Ali

ISLAMABAD: The Pakistan Press Foundation (PPF) has warned of a "bleak" year for media safety and free expression in Pakistan, documenting at least 137 confirmed incidents targeting journalists and media professionals between January and October this year.

In a report released to mark the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists, PPF said threats ranged from physical assaults and detentions to criminal complaints, censorship orders and internet shutdowns, despite constitutional guarantees of free expression.

The PPF urged authorities to move "beyond lip service" and implement domestic and international commitments to protect press freedom, including effective use of existing safety laws and mechanisms.

The report documented 35 incidents of physical assault and manhandling, along with two journalists injured while on assignment, five detentions, two abductions and four attacks on property, including raids.

Legal pressure remained significant, with eight arrests, 30 FIRs — 22 of which invoked the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (Peca), including the newly introduced Section 26-A on "fake information" — and 23 actions initiated by the FIA and the National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency.

Journalists also faced intimidation, including seven threats (online and offline), three threats of legal action, seven cases of harassment, sometimes involving family members or political rhetoric, and two journalists placed on the no-fly list.

Meanwhile, censorship and restrictions included six suspensions of mobile or internet services, a Pemra directive, a court order blocking 27 YouTube channels (later suspended in separate proceedings) and restrictions on reporting outside Adiala Jail.

'Brazen' attacks

The PPF said political leaders' rhetoric and government actions perpetuated a hostile climate for the press, alongside "brazen" attacks on property and the bulldozing of restrictive legislation.

It noted continued physical violence — including assaults, detentions and abductions — amid "a lack of preventive, protective and prosecutorial measures".

The report highlighted the risks faced by journalists covering climate disasters. On Aug 30, *Geo News* reporter Irfanullah and cameraman Ali Arsalan were allegedly assaulted and forced away by Punjab Enforcement and Regulatory Authority personnel while reporting on flood-hit residents in Faisalabad.

"In what has now appeared to become an unfortunate tactic are attempts to undermine the sanctity of physical spaces, including press clubs," the report said.

It said police forcibly entered Quetta Press Club on March 1; men linked to a shrine dispute attacked Badin Press Club on June 2; and Islamabad's National Press Club was raided on Oct 2, with journalists assaulted on the premises.

The PPF examined eight murders of media workers this year; six were deemed unrelated to journalistic work, while two — Abdul Latif Baloch and Imtiaz Mir — remain inconclusive.

It called for genuine, stakeholder-led reform rather than "bulldozing" measures such as the Pakistan Electronic Crimes (Amendment) Act 2025, which drew concern over potential misuse.

GOVERNMENT OF SINDH
SERVICES, GENERAL ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION DEPARTMENT

POSITIONS VACANT

Applications from eligible candidates having domicile of Province of Sindh are invited for the following vacancies in Services, General Administration and Coordination Department, as per qualification and experience indicated against the following post, within fifteen (15) days of publication of this advertisement:-

S. No.	Name of Post	BPS	No. of vacancies	Age Limits		Educational Qualification, Experience & Other Conditions as per recruitment rules
				Min.	Max.	
1	Junior Clerk	11	504	21	28	i) Graduate at least in Second Division from any University recognized by Higher Education Commission (HEC). ii) Six (06) months' Certificate Course in MS Office from an Institute recognized by the Sindh Board of Technical Education / Trade Testing Board.

02. Applicants who fulfill following requirements should apply for the aforementioned vacancies on Job Portal of Government of Sindh at https://sjp.gos.pk

i) Applicants must have successfully passed the General Screening Test of Graduation Category, with at least 40% marks, conducted by the Sukkur IBA Testing Services (STS) and possess its certificate, issued by STS, as required for appointment to the aforementioned posts.

ii) Age of the applicants shall be calculated from the closing date of submission of application as provided under Rule-7 of the Sindh Civil Servants (Relaxation of Upper Age Limit) Rules, 2024. However, the upper age relaxation limit will be 5 years as provided in Notification of Services, General Administration and Coordination Department bearing No.SOII(SGA&CD)564/2011(Part-II) dated 06.03.2025.

iii) The share of quota reserved for the initial appointment shall be adhered to as per Law / Rules / Policy of Government of Sindh.

iv) Those applicants who are already in Government Service should get NOC from their Department prior to submission of application and bring original copy of the NOC at the time of interview for submission before the Departmental Selection Committee.

v) The appointment shall be made as per the Policy Notified by the Government of Sindh on 26.04.2023 and under provisions of Sindh Civil Servants Act 1973 and its rule, as amended from time to time.

vi) The applicants should appear before the Departmental Selection Committee alongwith original documents for interview as per the schedule to be uploaded on the Job Portal.

vii) No TA & DA will be admissible for Interview.

Deputy Secretary (General)
SERVICES, GENEAL ADMINISTRATION AND COORDINATION DEPARTMENT
INF/KRY/3621/2025

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